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Fifty-fourth session
Item 3 of the provisional agenda

ORGANIZATION OF THE WORK OF THE SESSION

Letter dated 18 July 1997 from the head of the delegation of the United States of America to the Commission on Human Rights addressed to the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights

During the fifty-third session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the observer for the Palestine Liberation Organization made the outrageous charge that the Government of Israel had deliberately infected some 300 Palestinian children with the HIV virus. The representative of Israel immediately and convincingly refuted these charges.

My Government has learned that the newspaper that was the source of the Palestine Liberation Organization observer's "information" has retracted its original article, stating that it saw "its duty ... to emphasize the incorrectness of this serious news item" (al-Ahram, Cairo, 28 January 1997).

The United States is also aware of and appreciates your efforts to persuade the observer for the Palestine Liberation Organization to retract his statement.

Despite these efforts by you and the Bureau of the Commission on Human Rights, and despite the proven falsehood of the statements made by the observer for Palestine, the latter has so far failed to correct his remarks.

Therefore, the United States would like to put on record its abhorrence at, and rejection of, the malicious patently false and uncorrected accusation by the observer for the Palestine Liberation Organization. Such patently false statements have no place in deliberations at the United Nations and bring discredit upon the Organization. This is particularly true when one

notes that the observer for the Palestine Liberation Organization placed his allegation in the context of "genocide". Abasing the meaning of genocide in this way is unbefitting a representative to the United Nations. The United States Government strongly believes that the honourable course of action in this situation would be for the observer for the Palestine Liberation Organization to retract these remarks and apologize.

Failing that reasonable gesture from the observer for the Palestine Liberation Organization, my delegation respectfully requests that you, as Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights, demand that the observer for the Palestine Liberation Organization retract the remarks and apologise for the harm done to the image of the United Nations.

I further request that you circulate this letter, along with your letter to the Permanent Representative of Israel, and [the attached] unofficial translation of the al-Ahram retraction of its earlier article,* as an official document of the Commission.

(Signed): Nancy RUBIN
Head of the United States delegation
to the United Nations Commission on
Human Rights

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* The annex is circulated as received, in the language of submission only.

Annex

AL-AHRAM - RETRACTION OF AIDS STORY 27 OR 28 JANUARY 1997

(Unofficial translation)

HEADLINE: "AL-AHRAM DENIES THE STORY OF INJECTING AIDS VIRUS TO PALESTINIANS"

Al-Ahram published in its edition of 22 January 1997 on its first page a story, according to which the Israeli authorities injected 305 Palestinian children with the AIDS virus. Al-Ahram quoted this news item from the N.D.H. news agency which attributed the news item to an Israeli newspaper, Yediot Aharonot. When al-Ahram began to follow up the story at the level of investigation and analysis, it was surprised to find the news item is not true and that the Yediot Aharonot newspaper had not published anything of this kind. Al-Ahram also contacted the Ambassador of Egypt in Israel who completely denied that a story of this kind had been published in any Israeli newspapers, and therefore al-Ahram sees it as its duty, with regard to preserving its credibility regarding the information which it presents to its readers, to emphasize the incorrectness of this serious news item. Al-Ahram also informs its readers that it has taken all steps to guarantee the non-recurrence of a mistake of this kind, in order to preserve its reputation as a distinguished journalistic institution.